Animal Industry Report

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Modifying an Outdoor Farrowing Hut for Alternative Indoor Farrowing During Summer and Winter

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Summary and Implications

The objective of this project was to modify an outdoor farrowing hut for winter and summer farrowing indoors to meet niche pork market requirements. Typical modified A-frame plywood outdoor farrowing huts were used to farrow sows indoors in summer and winter. The farrowing occurred in an insulated lean-to shed of a larger machine shed.

During summer, the huts were fitted with a common 20-inch box fan positioned in the hut roof blowing down on the sow (Figures 2 and 3). This helped keep air moving over the sow during hot weather. At night when the temperature dropped, a thermostat in the fan would switch the fan off.

A hover was built for the back of each hut and fitted with two heat lamps (Figure 4). This attachment provided a warm draft-free area for the piglets away from the sow. Also, the heat lamps were inaccessible to the sow to minimize risk of fire. These simple modifications helped keep the sows comfortable and piglets warm in a bedded alternative farrowing arrangement.

Introduction

Niche pork markets have expanded rapidly and many niche pork marketers are recruiting producers. However, in the Midwest, frequently there are shortages of pigs born in the winter and summer and surpluses of pigs born in spring and fall. Most producers can meet the niche market requirements by farrowing outdoors in spring and fall. But farrowing outdoors in Midwest winters is difficult. Winter-farrowed sows will also farrow in the hot summer months, another challenging time due to heat and humidity. Therefore, the objective of this project was to modify an outdoor farrowing hut for winter and summer farrowing indoors to meet niche pork market requirements.

Materials and Methods

The ISU Allee Farm is a member of Niman Ranch Pork, which requires that pigs be produced in compliance with Animal Welfare Institute guidelines. For example, during farrowing bedding is required and crates are not permitted.

Typical modified A-frame plywood outdoor farrowing huts were used to farrow sows indoors in summer and winter. The farrowing occurred in an insulated lean-to shed of a larger machine shed (Figure 1). During winter, supplemental heat was supplied by an infrared tube heater. Efforts were made to keep the sows cool and piglets warm. Sows were allowed free access to feed and water outside the hut. Piglets were kept in the hut for the first few days after farrowing.

Results and Discussion

During summer, the huts were fitted with a common 20-inch box fan positioned in the hut roof blowing down on the sow (Figures 2 and 3). At night when the temperature dropped, a thermostat in the fan would switch the fan off.

A hover was built for the back of each hut and fitted with two heat lamps (Figure 4). This attachment provided a warm draft-free area for the piglets away from the sow. Also, the heat lamps were inaccessible to the sow to minimize risk of fire. These simple modifications have helped keep the sows comfortable and piglets warm in a bedded alternative farrowing arrangement.

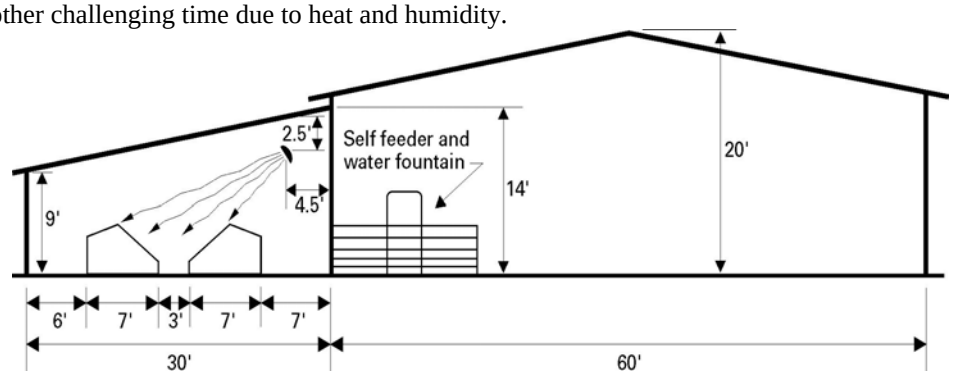

Figure 1. Alternative farrowing building at ISU Allee Farm, Newell, IA.

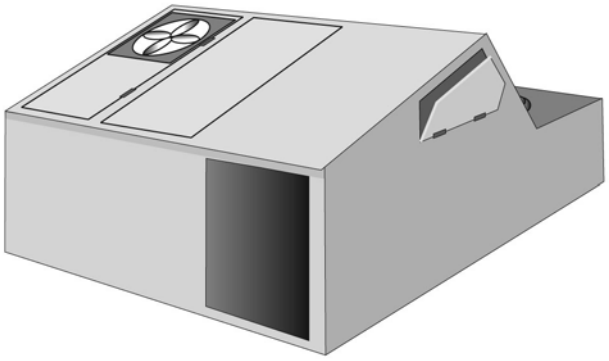

Figure 2. Exterior of modified A-frame farrowing hut showing fan in roof.

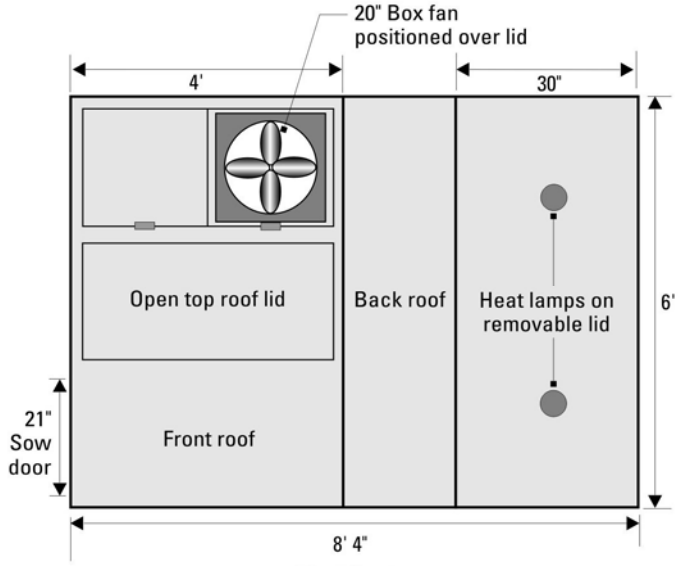

Figure 3. Top view of modified A-frame farrowing hut showing box fan and heat lamps.

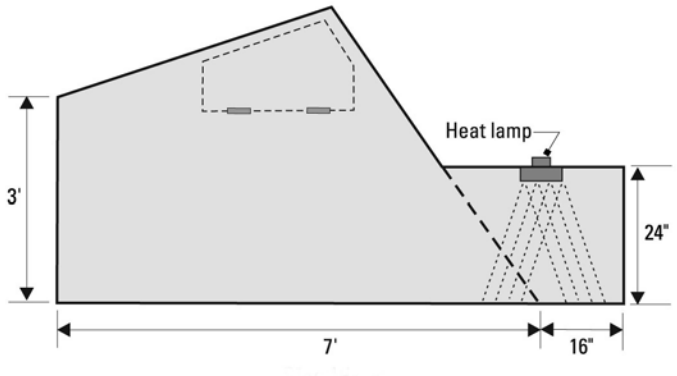

Figure 4. End view of modified A-frame farrowing hut showing added hover with heat lamp.